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SUBJECT: NEW KREMLIN-BACKED RIGHT CAUSE PARTY EMERGES FROM
SPS ASHES

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Alice Wells for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

11. (SBU) Summary: On November 16, a new Kremlin-supported "liberal" opposition party - Right Cause - emerged from the ashes of 1990s-era liberal standard-bearer Union of Right Forces (SPS), which along with two other vanity political parties (Democratic Party and Civil Force) voted to dissolve on November 15. Despite assurances from Right Cause leaders that the party would not be a Kremlin puppet, strong Kremlin influence already permeates the party structure. Right Cause is gunning for seats in the March 2009 regional elections and then in the next State Duma elections, but it received an immediate boost when the Central Election Commission erased previous party debts. Leading SPS members cried foul, with the Moscow Regional branch voting against the party's suicide, but they were a distinct minority among members who accepted compromise over confrontation with the Kremlin. The new party's congress debuted on prime-time television. End Summary.

SPS Dissolves Despite Opposition Pleas And Nemtsov's Return

12. (SBU) As expected, the Union of Right Forces (SPS), the Democratic Party of Russia (DPR), and Civil Force voted in separate November 15 congresses to dissolve themselves. At the SPS congress, regional delegates and party leaders debated throughout the day-long congress, with Acting SPS chairman Leonid Gozman emphasizing the party's massive debts and lack of media access as key reasons to vote for dissolution.

13. (C) SPS Political Council member Maria Gaidar led the minority opposition to dissolution, lamenting "the destruction of the last independent party in Russia" and demanding an investigation into allegedly falsified regional congresses. The congress voted almost unanimously against her motions. Moscow SPS leader Vladlen Maksimov, who opposed dissolution, told us at the congress that the day's events were so orderly and open to the public because "the conclusion was already decided inside the Kremlin." (Note: This is likely why Gozman, as he adjourned the congress for a mid-afternoon break, could joke to delegates that "it is okay for you to speak with Maria Gaidar, she is not dangerous." Nonetheless, she sat alone in a crowded lobby for the entire 40-minute break. End note.) In the final vote, delegates voted 97-9 in favor of dissolving the party. Dissenting votes included delegates from Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kostroma, Amur, and Voronezh regions.

14. (C) The congress's only surprise came from former SPS leader Boris Nemtsov, who re-activated the party membership he suspended in February, and then offered to take financial responsibility for SPS if delegates would vote against

dissolution. (Note: Nemtsov's improbable eleventh-hour heroics played more like a political stunt, for which he was rewarded with a barrage of media attention. End note.) Nemtsov told us November 17 that he objected to opposition operating from within the Kremlin framework, and blasted Gozman as "amoral" and a "dwarf who wants to be a Schwarzenegger."

Right Cause Unveils Leaders and Pro-Business Platform

15. (SBU) On November 16, members of SPS, DPR, and Civil Force held a joint congress to unite into a new political party called Right Cause (Pravoe Delo). Right Cause adopted a party program, selected a symbol (tri-color star), and elected three co-chairmen. As expected, the chairmen were Acting SPS Chairman Leonid Gozman, Delovaya Rossiya leader Boris Titov, and political scientist Georgiy Bovt. At a November 17 press conference, the chairmen identified a short-term goal of winning seats in the March 2009 regional elections and long-term goal of winning State Duma seats. The debut of Right Cause was featured at length on prime-time national television, which served as the clearest sign of Kremlin approval.

16. (SBU) Describing Right Cause's ideology, Gozman explained that the party formed in response to the demand of small- and medium-sized businesses, making the party's formation "timely" given the deepening economic crisis in Russia. According to Gozman, "strong, enthusiastic people of action" are the most discriminated Russian demographic because they include entrepreneurs who are subject to arbitrary raids and

corrupt functionaries. Perhaps realizing the limits of that electoral demographic, Gozman later predicted that the middle class, students, pensioners, intelligentsia, and "independent people" also will support Right Cause.

17. (SBU) In addition to the three chairmen, Right Cause will include a Supreme Council, which will function as a monitoring and advisory body to develop strategy and formulate party tactics. Three people so far have agreed to serve on Right Cause's Supreme Council: RosNanotech head (and former SPS leader) Anatoliy Chubais, writer Marietta Chudakova, and Amedia CEO Aleksey Volin. Titov noted that a fourth chairman may be added to the party if additional organizations join the party.

Party Leaders Reject "Puppet" Label Despite Kremlin Ties

18. (C) When questioned by reporters about their opposition credentials, the Right Cause chairmen failed to name a single ally from among the existing political opposition. Trying nonetheless to link his new party with other opposition factions, Gozman insisted that "we share the same ideals and seek similar goals" as the new Solidarity movement, but "we use different methods." Opposition leaders Garry Kasparov, Boris Nemtsov, Mikhail Kasyanov, and Vladimir Milov, however, have all called Right Cause just a "Kremlin puppet." Indeed, even some Right Cause delegates acknowledged the Kremlin's role, with former Kemerovo SPS head and now Right Cause member Dmitriy Shagiakhmatov confirming to us November 16 that the new party's structure gives the Kremlin a two-thirds vote and the vestigial SPS faction one-third.

19. (C) Gozman objected unconvincingly to Vesti TV November 16 that, although Right Cause was established "with the help of the Kremlin," the party would not be pro-Kremlin. In fact, the Kremlin's sway over Right Cause is much stronger than Gozman lets on. Andrei Dunaev, an acolyte of Kremlin Deputy Chief of Staff Vladislav Surkov, will be Right Cause's chief of staff. Sergey Tsybukhov, who headed the St. Petersburg "Za Putina" ("For Putin") movement, will lead that city's Right Cause branch. The party's Moscow branch will be led by Euroset chairman Yevgeniy Chichvarkin, who previously worked

with United Russia, including on its "Strategy 2020" forum on business. (Note: Nemtsov speculated that Chichvarkin, who has faced "raiding" on his Euroset chain, may be seeking alternative political protection. End note.)

With Kremlin Backing and No Debts, Electoral Optimism High

¶10. (SBU) The three chairmen declined to predict their prospects for the March regional elections. However, Duma Vice-Speaker Oleg Morozov told Kommersant November 14 that Right Cause may benefit from President Medvedev's November 5 proposal to reserve a couple Duma seats for parties garnering between 5-7 percent of the vote. Political scientist Dmitriy Orlov seconded this prediction on November 14. At the November 16 inaugural congress, former DPR head Andrei Bogdanov improbably predicted that Right Cause would receive 15 percent of the vote. Russians, however, may not share Bogdanov's optimism: a VTsIOM poll conducted just before the inaugural congress revealed that 32 percent of Russians said it is "hard to say" if the party will be successful, and 29 percent do not believe it has any chance of success.

¶11. (SBU) In any case, Right Cause has received a substantial gift to mark its birth. The Central Election Commission's Yelena Dubrovina told Kommersant November 18 that Right Cause is not a legal successor of the three dissolved parties, and as such the CEC has canceled those parties' debts for the 2007 Duma campaign. SPS's debts alone totaled 7 million USD. (Note: Parties receiving less than 3 percent of the vote are obliged to pay for their "free" campaign media airtime and print space. End note.)

Comment

¶12. (C) The disappearance of one of the last opposition standard-bearers (Yabloko yet remains) marks a clear victory for the Kremlin in marginalizing political adversaries and effectively controlling their continued presence on the political stage. Although SPS barely registered in recent national elections and had minuscule support outside Moscow and St. Petersburg, its party registration represented a

potential, however unlikely, rallying point for opposition should the economic crisis metastasize into a political one. The integration of government loyalists into the party leadership signals the Kremlin's careful oversight of its "project." An important unknown now is who exactly - Medvedev, Putin, Surkov, or someone else - will control Right Cause's agenda and membership. And whatever Gozman's purported intentions are to be his own man, it is clear that any opposition from Right Cause will be within Kremlin-dictated limits. End comment.
BEYRLE